THE EFFECT OF AN ELECTIVE INDEPENDENT READING PROGRAM ON READING SCORES AND INTEREST IN READING IN THE NINTH GRADE AT KURTZ JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, DES MOINES, IOWA

An Abstract of a Field Report by
Virginia Mortenson
August 1975
Drake University
Advisor: Dr. Stuart C. Tiedeman

The problem. What Americans will do with increased leisure time in the future is a problem already under investigation by sociologists and psychologists. Many young people in today's society do not enjoy reading books as a leisure time activity, possibly because of methods of teaching or treating reading in the schools today. Independent reading classes are an attempt to overcome resistance to reading. The purpose of this study was to determine what, if any, improvement in standardized reading scores occurred and to determine whether or not interest in reading for the sake of enjoyment increased in a ninth grade elective independent reading course at Kurtz Junior High School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Procedure. Thirty-two members of the newly-created Independent Reading Class at Kurtz Junior High School were matched on a one-to-one basis on comprehension reading scores from the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test given at the end of eighth grade, sex and age. A different form of the same test was given at the end of their ninth grade year as was an attitude-toward-reading opinionnaire. The attitude inventory was given to give reading teachers for item-ratings so that scores could be assigned and compared between experimental and control groups. Four sets of scores were used and t-tests using the mean difference over the standard error of the mean difference determined the significance of the comparisons. Tables are included for interpretation.

Findings. The study shows that even though significant differences at the .05 level of the probability distribution did not exist in reading ability over the 1974-1975 school year in the experimental/ Independent Reading Class made significant gains in their own comprehension scores from the Gates-McGinnitie Pre and Post tests. The members of the independent reading class through written evaluations of the course expressed a positive attitude toward the class and their own reading. The warm relationships established on a one-to-one basis between the "teachers," students, and the books that they read seemed to warrent the existence and continuation of the course.

Conclusions. The findings of this study, on an objective basis, do not prove that an independent reading class at the ninth grade level increases the reading ability or improves the attitude toward reading of the students enrolled any more than for students not enrolled. On a subjective basis, however, the ninth grade students who completed a school year in an Independent Reading Class voted unanimously that self-selection had played an important role in their reading development.

THE EFFECT OF AN ELECTIVE INDEPENDENT READING PROGRAM ON READING SCORES AND INTEREST IN READING IN THE NINTH GRADE AT KURTZ JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, DES MOINES, IOWA

A Field Report

Presented to

The School of Graduate Studies

Drake University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

---

by

Virginia Mortenson

August 1975

THE EFFECT OF AN ELECTIVE INDEPENDENT READING PROGRAM ON READING SCORES AND INTEREST IN READING IN THE NINTH GRADE AT KURTZ JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL DES MOINES, IOWA

by

Virginia Mortenson

Approved by Committee:

Stuart C. Tiedeman
Chairman

Howard W. Traxler

Earle L. Canfield
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

What Americans will do with increased leisure time in the future has become a question of interest to psychologists and sociologists. The reading of books could be a possible pleasant and thought-provoking activity. However, there is evidence to indicate that many students in the schools today, future adults in tomorrow's society, do not enjoy reading books. One reason many young people do not enjoy reading may be that they have been conditioned to associate reading with the classroom where they have never read a book for enjoyment, itself, where they are told what to read whether they are interested in the subject or not, are unable to read on the level of the material, where possibly a written report is assigned or a test is administered over the material read, or questions at the end of each chapter are to be answered.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. One attempt to overcome the resistance to reading has been the introduction into school systems of elective Independent Reading courses. The purpose of this project was to determine what, if any,

improvement in standardized reading scores occurred and to determine whether or not interest in reading for the sake of enjoyment increased in a ninth grade elective Independent Reading course at Kurtz Junior High School in Des Moines. As a result of this study, it is believed that more ninth grade students may enjoy and improve their reading through the development of more individualized reading programs.

Scope and limitation. At the beginning of the 1974-1975 school year, there were thirty-seven ninth grade students enrolled in the newly-created Independent Reading Class. By the end of the first semester six students had dropped the course for various reasons, such as the following: (1) one had planned on taking study hall for the second semester at the beginning of the year; (2) one decided to use the time in the dark room developing pictures for the school newspaper; (3) two indicated a dislike for the class; and (4) two were asked to leave the class for disciplinary reasons. At the same time, the end of the semester, five new students elected to take independent reading during the second semester. To the original thirty-one students remaining, the five new ones increased the total to thirty-six. Of the thirty-six there were four students who had not taken the Gates-McGinnitie Pre-test at the conclusion of their eighth grade year for one reason or another. Eventually, the study involved the remaining thirty-two students.

On the attitude-toward-reading opinionnaire there were two students in the control group whose attitudes could not be included and, therefore, could not be compared. One of those students dropped out of school, and the other student refused to participate. There were, thus, thirty students who were available for comparison on the opinionnaire.

A limiting feature of the study was that the thirty-two students in the control group who were matched on a one-to-one basis with students in the experimental group did not attend an actual reading class in which stories were assigned, questions answered, and/or written reports made on a day-to-day arrangement, but were, instead, in an English class where there was an above-average amount of freedom in reading selection.

Because Independent Reading was a new course, the librarian and teacher team in charge were somewhat hesitant about the best way to conduct the class. The group was moved several times back and forth from the library to a classroom in an attempt to find the most effective reading atmosphere. In the classroom where the students seemed to read better, the books were not available; therefore, students either had to make trips to the library where the librarian was not available, since she was conducting conferences in the classroom or had to wait out a class session with no book.

Several methods of signing up for book conferences were also employed in an attempt to discover the most

efficient of meeting the needs of the students. Therefore, the students may have felt a lack of specific guidelines at times. Without the constant supervision usually encountered in a junior high school reading class, some students lacked the emotional maturity and self-control to concentrate on reading when the teacher and librarian were engaged in individual book references.

Chapter 2

PROCEDURE

The purpose of this chapter will be to describe the procedure used in this study to show the effect of an individualized reading approach on the reading ability and attitude about reading of a group of ninth grade students.

I. GENERAL DESIGN

At the conclusion of the 1973-74 school year at Kurtz Junior High School, south side Des Moines, the Gates-McGinnitie Diagnostic Reading Test was administered to the 249 eighth graders enrolled at that time. Later, when planning their ninth grade programs, these same eighth grade students learned of a new elective ninth grade course, entitled Independent Reading. Although the scores on the test were available at that time, students were neither encouraged nor discouraged from signing up for independent reading on the basis of their reading scores.

In order to measure whether or not the Independent Reading Class improved their reading scores and increased their enjoyment in reading, a comparison was conducted using thirty-two of the members of the Independent Reading Class of Kurtz Junior High School ninth graders who are designated

as the experimental group and a matched sample of thirty-two Kurtz High School ninth graders not enrolled in the independent reading class who served as the control group. The two groups were matched on a one-to-one basis on reading scores at the end of eighth grade, sex, and age. The Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, given to all Kurtz Junior High School eighth graders before they elected courses for ninth grade this year, was used as the pre-test. This same test was given again at the end of the ninth grade year to the experimental group and the control group. In addition, an attitude-toward-reading instrument was administered to all individuals in each group at the end of their ninth grade year (Appendix A).

The attitude inventory was given to five reading teachers separately for the purpose of weighing test items by giving each a progressive number value on the basis of whether or not the statement revealed poor, fair, or excellent attitude toward reading. A scale was devised by combining and comparing the results of the teachers' item analysis. After the attitude instrument was administered to both the experimental and control groups, the answers were tallied according to the numerical value of each in order to evaluate whether or not the attitude on the whole of the Independent Reading Class was better than the general attitude of those ninth graders not enrolled in Independent Reading.

Four sets of scores were determined: (1) the difference between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores of

the experimental group on the comprehension section of the Gates-McGinnitie Test; (2) the difference between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores of the control group on the comprehension section of the Gates-McGinnitie Test; (3) the difference between matched pairs on the Gates-McGinnitie post-test comprehension (experimental minus control in each case); (4) the difference between matched pairs on the attitude measure (experimental minus control). The analysis consisted of a t-test for the mean difference for each of the four sets of scores.

II. THE CONTROL GROUP

The selection of the control group was limited to those students in the experimenter's ninth grade English classes whose scores on the Gates-McGinnitie pre-test were available. From this group the members of the control group were compiled by matching the comprehension scores from the Gates-McGinnitie pre-test with the exact scores earned by members of the independent reading class/experimental group. Therefore, since the criteria for matching included pre-test scores, age and sex, the control group, as the experimental group, consisted of thirty-two ninth grade students, eighteen girls and fourteen boys, whose Gates-McGinnitie pre-test comprehension scores matched those of the experimental group on a one-to-one basis.

The control group was not enrolled in a reading class, but each member was enrolled in a ninth grade English class

as was each member of the experimental group; however, each member of the experimental group was not necessarily in one of the experimenter's English classes as the members of the control group were.

The unit method of study was employed in the English class in which all of the control group members and fourteen of the experimental group members were involved. Readings were assigned from Bailey's Worlds to Explore along with a wide variety of supplementary reading materials. The emphasis of the class was not on reading, but reading was a part of a course which included writing (poetry, prose, and newspaper articles), public speaking, listening, discussing, acting, library researching, and studying practical grammar rules.

During a four-week novel unit, students were allowed to choose their own full-length fiction book to read during English class time. Many students read several books during the four weeks, while others read books that had been recent movies. A written book report was assigned which was based on an outline that required a list of characters from the book; a summary of the plot with specific designation of exposition, climax, and denouement; a statement of theme; and a creation of a totally original conclusion other than the one presented in the book.

III. THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Thirty-seven ninth graders at Kurtz Junior High School were originally enrolled in Independent Reading. Speaking individually with students from the class, it was learned that some had never before completed a novel. Some students chose the course because "It sounded easy." Others chose the course because "My friend is taking the class." There were students who wanted to take the course but because of academic area requirements or parental pressures ("My parents think the course would be a waste of time,") did not elect Independent Reading. The eighth grade test results revealed that the students in the newly developed ninth grade Independent Reading class had standard scores on the Gates-McGinnitie with the following range: comprehension 24 to 49; grade level 5.8 to 12.9; vocabulary 18 to 48, grade level 6.9 to 12.9.

During the first semester of the Independent Reading class, fall 1974, the students were required to read a minimum of ten books. After the student completed a book, he or she signed up for a conference on a sheet provided which included the name of the book, date completed, and name. The student then left a copy of the book on the "class cart" so that the teacher or librarian could read the book before conference time. At the end of each class period, the teacher and librarian divided the books to be read for conferences and arranged for conference time with the students.

Because some of the students read more rapidly than others, the teacher teaching team realized that some students were being seen during conference periods frequently while others were rarely seen. An example was one student, an avid reader, who had read and discussed thirty-two books by the end of the first semester. Another avid reader who was reading and enjoying longer college level books read and discussed seven books during the same length of time.

For the Spring semester 1975 it was decided to schedule students for conferences on a rotating, two-week basis and not to prescribe any certain number of books to be completed by the end of the semester. At the end of each week the names of students to be seen the following week were listed alphabetically on a master dito along with the name of their books and the person with whom they would be talking during the conference. The weekly list of conferences was then distributed to the class on Monday of each week so that students knew the exact day of their conference, which would be held whether a book was completed or not so that problems might be discussed or guidance offered. Friday was often left open as a make-up day.

During the conference the teacher or librarian listened to a brief summary of the plot of a particular book. The discussion that followed the summary sometimes revolved around the theme, or how the behavior of a character or characters could be adapted to the real life of the reader. Examples of conference questions are as follows:

1. How would you rate this book on a scale from 1 to 10?
2. How would you compare the characters in this book to your friends?
3. Would you make friends with any character in this book? Why or why not?
4. What word would best describe _(a character)_ and what did the character say or do to prove that this description is valid?
5. Did anything happen in this book that you would like to have happen to you?
6. Did anything happen in this book that you would not like to have happen to you?
7. Was this book realistic? Why or why not?
8. What, if anything, did you learn about life, yourself, or other people from this book?

The individual conferences were viewed as an important aspect of the independent learning experience by the teacher team and also by the students if their requests for added conferences and their enthusiasm in conversing during the conferences were any indication.

The independent reading course at Kurtz Junior High School, therefore, was not "taught" in the traditional manner of many classrooms; instead, the Kurtz librarian and the ninth grade English teacher sat with the students, read with them, and discussed the content of the books read on a

person-to-person, conversational level.

Three important objectives of the independent reading class were as follows:

1. The student will choose books to read in which he or she is interested. (There was no prescribed reading list to limit selections.)

2. The student will read primarily for the enjoyment of reading. (There were no tasks to be completed as "punishment" for reading; however, because grades are required, an evaluation paper, indicating the type of book and the depth of discussion, was filled out and filed by the librarian or the teacher after a book had been discussed.) (See Appendix B.)

3. Because the student will be reading more due to increased reading time (each day's class period) and reading more because he or she is exposed to books in which he or she is interested, the student will improve his or her reading score during the year enrolled in ninth grade Independent Reading.

Chapter 3

RELATED LITERATURE

> One out of every four students nationwide has significant reading deficiencies.
>
> In large city school systems up to half of the students read below expectation.
>
> There are more than three million illiterates in our adult population.
>
> About half of the unemployed youth, ages 16 to 21, are functionally illiterate.
>
> Three-quarters of the juvenile offenders in New York City are two or more years retarded in reading.
>
> In a recent U. S. Armed Forces program called project 100,000, 68.2 percent of the young men fell below grade 7 in reading and academic ability.[1]

Most educators recognize the tragedy that these statistics represent for individuals and the society, but for the majority not included in statistics who acquire the basic reading skills without an accompanying desire to read, there is just as ominous a barrier against the right to read.[2]

> Therefore, as U. S. Commissioner of Education, I am herewith proclaiming my belief that we should set for ourselves the goal of assuring that by the end of the 1970's the right to read shall be a reality for all that no one shall be leaving our schools without the skill and the desire necessary to the full limits of his capability.[3]

---

[1]James E. Allen, Jr., "The Right to Read: Education's New National Priority," Readings on Teaching Reading, Sebesta, Sam Leston and Carl Wallen, eds. (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972), p. 9.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

The United States Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, Jr., with his proclamation, zeroed in on a target that certainly can be cited and with current research in reading must be hit.

> . . . This decade devoted to the improvement of reading should include a new and intensive attack in the area of need. . . . This is a proper goal for our society because it will not only correct the injustice done to individuals by the denial of their right, but it will also, because of its widespread social and cultural effect, benefit and strengthen the entire fabric of our society.[1]

That a society gathers strength in education was recognized by our forefathers. Democracy and education, according to Thomas Jefferson, were inseparable: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.[2]

To a nation that continues to value individual achievement, which is related to the maintenance of democracy, there must be the "opportunity for all children to develop themselves to their fullest capacity regardless of any unfortunate circumstances they may have inherited."[3] President Kennedy stated, "First, and most important is that every American girl and boy have the opportunity to develop whatever talents he has."[4]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 10.

[2]Sebesta, Leston and Wallen, Readings on Teaching Reading, op. cit., Introduction, p. 3.

[3]Ibid., p. 4.

[4]Ibid.

Our forefathers, our Presidents, our educators, our well-known thinkers, leaders and many of our working people in America have manifested the ideals of education and its close ally, reading. Why, then, as of 1972-1975, are we being shocked by tragic statistics on reading performance? Why are secondary teachers shaking their heads over non-readers in their classrooms? Why do not children who know how to read like to read for enjoyment? Where have we failed? How have we failed? What are we going to do to meet James Allen, Jr's. challenge before the 1980's?

Parts of the answers to these questions can be found perhaps in the history of reading within the educational system. In some segments of the American society dating back to immediately after the invention of movable type when "printing was a novelty and reading was viewed as being a distinguishing characteristic of the cultivated man. The purpose of readings was to show that you were sufficiently wealthy to afford the time and tutoring required to learn and the refinement needed to care. . . ."[1] Therefore, regarded as a preoccupation of the "high brow," reading may be considered a "waste of time" or "putting on airs" by various groups in America even today.

Another partial answer to the reading and educational question challenging society today may lie in the traditional methods used to teach reading in the past, some of which are

---

[1]Ibid., p. 3.

still being clung to by unbending, stagnant educators in and out of the classroom.

The alphabet method was the first approach to teaching children how to read which was used in this country. Memorization and oral reading were the key to this method, with Noah Websters' American Spelling Book, popularly known as the 'blue-back speller,' appearing in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Reading instruction under the Webster system required that the child laboriously spell out each word that he would need to use in reading sentences and stories included in the book.[1]

The McGuffey Reader, prepared by William Holmes McGuffey, was the first successful graded reader and sold about 122 million copies between 1836 and 1920. Sullivan said that "to nine out of ten average Americans what taste of literature they got from McGuffeys' was all they ever had; what literature the children brought into the home in McGuffeys' Readers was all that ever came . . . McGuffey, in short, because of the leverage of his readers, had a large part in forming the mind of America."[2]

The word method of instruction, which replaced the alphabet-spelling method during the middle of the nineteenth

---

[1]Roland West, Individualized Reading Instruction (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1964), p. 4.

[2]Mark Sullivan, Out Times: The United States; 1900-1925 (New York: Scribners, 1927), p. 11.

century, was itself modified by the phonic method developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, it was soon found that there was a loss of word understanding, and there were many spelling mistakes due to using the phonetic system.[1]

Thought-getting rather than work attack mastery was the emphasis after the First World War. Rapid silent reading was stressed as a major objective of the reading program, which encouraged the development of objective tests to measure reading achievement. Practice exercises were widely used.[2]

Because children were expected to identify new words mostly from context clues, new words introduced in early readers became problems. In the early 1930's the concept of vocabulary control was presented in an effort to keep word count low while maintaining interesting content. Looking at the Dick and Jane series, it is evident that the interest factor in the readers' content suffered as a result.[3]

Out of the controlled-vocabulary concept came the series of basic reading text books, "the revised editions of which are currently in use in the great majority of classrooms today."[4] In theory, these series of graded books were to carry the child from year to year to be dumped off at the

---

[1]West, op. cit., p. 5.

[2]Ibid., p. 6.

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

[4]Ibid., p. 8.

high school where it was then assumed that he "has had it."

By the 1940's it had become apparent that some children could not proceed from book to book as rapidly as others, and many educators and school supervisors encouraged teachers to divide their classes into subgroups so that the varying levels of reading ability could be accommodated. By the end of the 1940's most of the elementary schools in the nation had established the basal reading program with its attendant ability grouping within their classrooms.[1]

> In effect, the term, 'Basal Reading Program,' implies the use of a series of basic reading textbooks which typically consists of anthologies of largely fictional selections, sequentially systematically arranged on the basis of the vocabulary control and the entry that each selection offers into the teaching of the developmental reading skills.[2]

Relatively homogeneous ability groups must then be formed out of the heterogeneous classrooms in order to use the basal reading program. Because a teacher is probably unable to handle a large number of groups, usually three is the standard in a typical elementary school classroom. In the junior high, most of the ability grouping has been handled by the school administration via scheduling.

"The criteria for deciding who should be in what group under such a teaching program are usually the scores received by the student in the class on the most recently administered reading achievement test."[3]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 9. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

In the groups, the students and teachers

> . . . proceed to 'work through' these texts, taking each story and its related vocabulary, skills, and workbook pages sequentially. Important to the success of the basal reading program is the unity and oneness that must characterize the daily progression of each of the reading groups; there is usually little room in such a program, in practice, for gearing its directions and progress to the interests, pace, and unique needs of each individual member of the group.[1]

Since about 1950, articles began appearing in educational journals criticizing the basal reading program on what was termed the 'lock step' approach to reading instruction. At the same time interest without much carry-through in individualization gained impetus as an alternative method in reading. "Some educators began to express a belief that an unjustifiably high incidence of poor or retarded readers was to be found in the public schools of the nation."[2] Several writers also pointed out that "a growing number of young people had failed to develop any permanent interest in reading as a leisure-time activity."[3]

Surveys indicated that "large numbers of elementary school children did little reading on their own, that high school students held reading in relatively low esteem, and few adults were found to be widely read."[4] Commenting on the results of these studies, McMahan wrote: "It is estimated that fewer than half the people in the United

---

[1]Ibid., p. 10.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 11.

[4]Ibid.

States ever read a book; fewer than one-fifth of them ever buy a book."[1]

How much change has occurred in the schools to rectify a so-called "bad" situation; the complaints of the 1950's are still being heard in the 1970's.

Betts, writing in 1972, condemned what he designated as "Regimented Reading" in the schools today. "For several generations an enormous stumbling block in reading instruction has been the fruitless attempt to regiment reading instruction--to assume that all pupils are prepared to learn to read upon admission to school, to use the same textbooks with all pupils of that fiction called a grade."[2]

A poignant analogy was written by Moses comparing instruction in reading to instruction in speaking which further validated the existence of a problem and the need for more widespread updating in the reading programs of the schools.

> Imagine what might happen if a child were instructed in speaking as he is now in reading. First of all, he would live in a world where very few people spoke; then, in school, he would be placed in a situation where he could hear only a certain number of very simple words--no exotic words, no lovely words, no fascinating words. When he had learned to pronounce these words clearly and could define and spell them all, he would be allowed to hear a few more words. As he grew older and began to use his new words, an exact number for each grade level, in conversations and stories, he would be asked to write

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Emmett A. Betts, "Reading: Psychological and Linguistic Bases," Readings on Teaching Reading, Sebesta, Sam Leston, and Carl Wallen, eds. (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972), p. 87.

> a report, a summary of each conversation. In addition, when he reached high school, his statements, his comments would be discussed in class. Phrases and sentences would be pulled apart, analyzed, criticized. As he progressed through school, adding more selected words to his vocabulary, he would be exposed for weeks at a time to great bodies of words used in, for example, the eighteenth century, words now out of date, words which have little connection with his life outside the school room. Wherever he went in school or library, he would be allowed to speak only of certain topics, forbidden or discouraged from discussing others. He would often be told that when he was a little older, he could say certain words, construct new types of sentences--but not yet. He would constantly be tested on his progress, how many words he knew, what they meant, how they were pronounced; but no one would ever think to ask him, did he <u>like</u> speaking, was talking pleasurable for him. Secret clubs--perhaps called speak-easys--would be formed where young people could go and talk about forbidden things, talk up a storm about anything. Meanwhile, back in school, the results of the Speaking Abilities Test would place them at a third-grade speaking level.[1]

Moses continued in his paper by asking, "Given this type of speaking instruction--a method vaguely reminiscent of present-day reading programs--what sort of culture might we have?"[2] The answer, of course, is obvious:

> Not only illiterate, but mute as well, or functionally mute, at least. Without language, there would, of course, be nothing to think with. By the same token, without books and reading, one's spoken language remains primitive, unadorned, and unelaborated. Thinking remains provincial and dreamless.[3]

Moses stated that no one ever asked a student whether or not he or she <u>liked</u> "speaking." What would students say about reading in the schools today and how their own reading

---

[1]Richard B. Moses, "For the Teens, Interest Comes First," <u>What Is Reading Doing to the Child?</u> Nancy Larrick and John A. Stoops, eds. (Danville, Ill.: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1965), pp. 99-100.

[2]Ibid., p. 100. [3]Ibid.

interests and abilities have been affected? Moderator Isabel K. Heller did ask pertinent questions of students about reading--students from Philadelphia Public Schools who served on a panel:

> Q: "How much time do you find you have for reading--reading that is not tied up with school work?"
> A^1: "I don't have much time because I never liked to read that much. And when I started school, I didn't have much time to read. I just read the books that are assigned at school."
> A^2: "I have a reading class where we read different stories in small booklet form. Then, on the back there are questions which help us get more meaning out of the story we read."
> Q: "Are the books that you read in school interesting?"
> A^1: "Well, I like to pick my own books, but we are required to read certain things. I have to if I want to get a good grade."
> Q: "What kind of books do you think we should require all students to read?"
> A^1: "If I was the teacher, I would let the kids choose their own books and let them write their own reports on the books. Everybody likes different books. Like one would like a biography, another a love story, and another a mystery. I'd just let them choose their own reading material."
> Q: "If you had one or two words of wisdom for teachers about how they could help improve reading, what would you tell them?"
> A: "I would tell a teacher he should call on each kid and ask what kind of books he likes. Take a poll in the class: so many like mysteries, so many like science fiction and so on. Then, he should get a library of these books. Then everybody would enjoy reading."[1]

Newton would support the teen-agers on the Philadelphia panel by adding that the major criticisms of secondary education today may be traced to the neglect of instruction in

---

[1]Nancy Larrick and John A. Stoops, "Teenagers Talk About Their Reading," What Is Reading Doing to the Child? (Danville, Ill.: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1967), pp. 81-87.

reading. Secondary underachievement, lack of interest in all subjects, is often a direct result of insufficient mastery of the reading skills.[1] Poor readers have not become good readers just because they reached junior high school where more reading was assigned.[2]

And even though many secondary teachers realize that students are unable to perform well because of what has gone before, they still feel that it is not their job to teach students how to read their individual subjects. Because materials are supplied to classrooms by subject matter, it is easier to keep everyone together reading the same book, and there is only so much time to cover the material required for the course.[3]

Following are some answers given to an open-ended questionnaire by a sophomore girl about her reasons for dropping out of school:

> (1) The subject giving me the most trouble . . ." "Anything with reading in it."
> (2) School is . . . "pretty good until it comes to reading."
> (3) Teachers could have helped me by . . . "showing me how to read my assignments."
> (4) If I were a big wheel . . . "I'd see to it that my teacher knew how to teach reading."[4]

---

[1]J. Roy Newton, Reading in Your School (New York: McGraw-Hill Bode Company, Inc., 1960), p. 6.

[2]Morton Botel, How to Teach Reading (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 15-16.

[3]Newton, op. cit., p. 7. [4]Ibid.

Not only do many teachers refuse to believe it is their job to "teach" reading, but many continue to teach literary masterpieces with which they are familiar ("I just love to teach _____"). From an effective teaching point of view, these teachers are close to being in a rut and are ignoring the question, "Why do we have to do this?"[1]

Of course, abandoning everything simply because it is old is not advocated, but teachers might do well to examine newer materials and ask if worthwhile concepts upon which society depends cannot be taught just as effectively from more current sources which are likely to be of more interest.[2]

Some evidence against the schools today seems to be that in the high schools, junior highs, and elementary levels there are students with above average ability "getting by" with, for them, inferior reading. There is, secondly, an alarming dropout rate both in high school and college level. The schools need, in some way, to provide . . . "materials suited to his (the student's) age and interest, and at a rate best suited to him . . . so that he starts from when he is, not from where he should be."[3]

What the students on the Philadelphia panel suggested individually--innocent as they may be of the educational jargon--was the acceptance of individualized reading programs in

---

[1]Ibid., p. 9. [2]Ibid., p. 10. [3]Ibid., p. 12.

the schools for possibly every grade level. In individualized reading programs perhaps, there may be at least a vehicle to progress effectively toward James Allen, Jr's goal for the 1980's.

Witty has condensed some arguments that have been advanced by proponents of individualized reading.

> They asserted that the individualized method of teaching reading could do what the ability-grouped basal reading program could never do--provide for the wide range of individual differences, not only in reading ability but also, and perhaps more importantly, in interests and needs.[1]

Other critics of the basal reading program contend that the wealth of children's literature is being wasted in non-individualized schools. Children's literature should be used as the central core of a reading program not as a supplement or adjunct.[2]

Even though methods of teaching individualized reading may vary, West stated that basic to the philosophy of the individualized reading program is the abandonment of basic reading textbooks as the foundation of the reading program.

> According to the plan of individual reading each child, motivated by his own unique interests and needs, selects his own books and reads them under the teacher's guidance, hopefully during his own free time. The reading periods are usually so organized that the teacher is able to have regular short conferences with each individual student about the book that he is currently reading and the reading problem that he may be encountering.[3]

---

[1] Paul Witty, "Individualized Reading--a Summary and Evaluation," Elementary English, XXXVI (October, 1959), 18-87, 401-12.

[2] West, op. cit., p. 11.

[3] Ibid., p. 12.

This philosophy of individual instruction in reading would fit a developmental concept that Bagley and Conrad described: "That no two children grow alike is a fact, is provable and proven."[1]

Not only is the wide range of differences limited to such aspects of an individual as intelligence, height, weight, muscular coordination, and behavior traits, but, as Hughes has pointed out, "There is a rhythm of effort and relaxation in every individual which can never be the same in any two people."[2]

Therefore, Veatch concluded that "Seldom are two children ready to be reading from the same material at the same time . . . so that no reading program can be truly successful unless it is easily adjustable to the enormous variety of growth patterns, purposes, and interests found in any class."[3]

Veatch also compared the traits of seeking, self-selection, and pacing that exist in all creatures--man, woman, animal--to the way an individualized reading program

---

[1]N. Bagley and H. S. Conrad, "Child Development: General Aspects," Encyclopedia of Educational Research (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 141.

[2]Marie Hughes, "Theoretical Considerations Underlying Program of Self-selection with Recommendations," in Delores E. Palmer, To Determine the Relations of 4th Graders to a Program of Self-selection (University of Utah, 1946), Chap. VI.

[3]Jeanette Veatch, Individualizing Your Reading Program - Self-selection in Action (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1959), p. 6.

should be conducted. She described how a student uses seeking behavior when he or she explores the classroom or library book supply. If the supply is sufficient, the student will select a book that is right for him or her at that particular point of space, time, and development. Finally, according to a pace most suitable to the students' needs, he or she will read those selected books.[1]

Jacobs of Columbia University, respected authority on childhood education, wrote that in an individualized reading program the child, himself, is "intimately involved in establishing the thresholds of his own learnings: the child's recognition that 'This is what I really want to try to read.'"[2]

West described the individualized method of reading as "a way of thinking about reading which is based on an attempt to provide for individual differences while at the same time recognizing interest and purpose as prime factors in the learning process. It is designed to allow the child to develop his own unique direction and pace rather than to fit him into a prescribed mode of development supposed typical or normal for his age group."[3]

---

[1]Ibid., p. 8.

[2]Leland B. Jacobs, "Individualized Reading Is Not a Thing!" Individualized Reading Practices (Columbia University: Bureau of Publications), pp. 1-17.

[3]West, op. cit., p. 37.

Veatch stated that "Individualized reading is based on the psychology of success."[1] Self-confidence, it is said, is the memory of success; therefore, in order for learning to be successful, it must produce self-confidence. "Goals which are within the grasp of the learner and which tempt him to reach for ever higher and more exciting heights breed confidence."[2]

Throughout the state of Iowa and across the nation, individualized reading programs at the secondary level vary both in allotted time and procedures from one period per week, to a unit of 3-4 weeks, or to a semester elective which is usually limited to eleventh and/or twelfth graders. In her overview of individualized reading in Iowa, Burge, chairman of the state curriculum committee, "recommends that individualized reading be included to some extent at all grade levels (7-12) and no matter how the class is organized, the major concern should be time to read."[3]

Usually individualized classes are of a size that allows the teacher or teachers to do a creditable job with personalized conferences. So that the teacher can guide the student's reading and encourage him/her to develop reading

---

[1]Veatch, op. cit., p. 23. [2]Ibid.

[3]Georgia Burge, "Overview," Guided Individualized Reading (From Iowa Department of Public Instruction English Language Curriculum Series), Pamphlet #2.

habits that will be a source of pride, a conference is arranged between the teacher and the student.[1]

Arranged before or after a conference, questions about the book are aimed at encouraging students to relate the plot or theme to their own lives. The details of the plot by themselves receive little attention. "Major emphasis is placed upon the affective values of literature, and questions are geared to the particular interest and capabilities of the student."[2]

> An individual reading conference is, in a sense, an adaptation of the old Mark-Hopkins - on - the - end - of - a - log technique. However, in a classroom, planning and organization are necessary if personal attention is to be given to each child. While one child is with the teacher, the rest of the class must be enough absorbed in an activity to work along with a minimum of interruption of the teacher. The individual conference period should be the high point of the entire reading program. All reading roads should lead to it or come from it. If somehow it proves to be unrewarding to the child, the drive to read will be immediately and adversely affected. The better the conference, the better the learning. Instruction is best in these interviews when the teacher has perfected his skills of probing, questioning, and listening. The teacher must develop these skills so as to make the conference valuable, stimulating, and enjoyable, and still fit in the time allotted.[3]

Hunt divided the questions most frequently used in the successful conference into three major categories which are as follows. (Some typical questions are included for each category.)

I. <u>Appropriateness of the book</u>

A. Why did you choose this book?
B. Was this a good book for you to read?
C. Was this book hard or was it easy?

---

[1]Ibid., p. 1. [2]Ibid. [3]Veatch, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

D. What made it hard or easy?
E. Should you choose the same kind or a different kind of book next?

(Answers to such questions give real clues to how wise a choice the child has made. It is the function of the teacher through guidance to aid each child to make the best possible choice. But the choice belongs to the child; it should be his unless it is clear that he cannot handle this degree of freedom.)

II. Appreciativeness of Book

A. Was this a good book? if "Yes"; How good?
B. Was this a good book? if "No"; How poor?
C. How close to the top (bottom) would ypu put it?
D. Was this the best (worst) book you have read?
E. How much do you usually like books of this type?
F. Do you like other books by this same writer?
G. Who else do you think would like to read this book?

(A reader must learn to make judgments about his choices. All books and stories are not equally good or equally appreciated by all readers. Only by verbalizing his reactions can the reader determine the kinds of books and the particular books which are highly satisfactory to him. Taste for the good in literature can emerge only upon reflection about what is not so good.)

III. Values Gained From Book

A. Did this book tell or teach you something important that you did not know? or "What new ideas did you learn from reading this book?"
B. Which part of the book was most important?
C. What do you think the person who wrote this book was trying to say to you?
D. Tell me a few high points of the book.
E. Did something happen in the book that you would not like to have happen to you?
F. Did something happen in the book that you would like to have happen to you?
G. How true (imaginary) is this book?

(These questions cause the reader to make a judgment through selecting a part or parts. It becomes relatively easy for the teacher to tell

> whether the judgments made by the child are substantial or superficial. It is not necessary for the teacher to be intimately acquainted with all books read by children to discern the quality of the child's responses.)[1]

Hunt advised the teacher conducting a conference to draw some questions from each of the three categories but asked only a few questions of a student in any one conference due to the time element. Many times the choice of questions will be determined by the student's responses.[2]

Frequently, this conference also serves as the procedure for evaluation or a grade. Even though the emphasis in the individualized reading program is on the intrinsic rewards of reading, teachers often are required to and/or do utilize a system of evaluation in order to ascertain the students' progress. Obviously, the task of evaluating is complicated when every student is reading something different than every other child.[3]

"Teachers, administrators, and supervisors who have contributed to the literature on individualized reading often report the results of reading achievement tests to establish the validity of the method in promoting growth in children's reading power, but they uniformly reject such test results as the sole method of evaluation."[4]

---

[1]Lyman C. Hunt, "Patterns of Questions in the Individual Conference" (University of Vermont, 1971), pp. 1-3. (A Pamphlet).

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Veatch, op. cit., p. 27.

[4]West, op. cit., p. 122.

Although reading tests are helpful in individual diagnosis, not enough is explained in the test results alone. Tests do not tell the teacher whether the student reads widely, or whether he has a feeling of responsibility for accurately sharing his findings, whether his reading opens new possibilities for exploration, or whether the student is developing taste and discrimination in reading. Because the total reading program is designed to assure the development of these qualities, the student misses the essence of reading if these attributes are lacking even though he may have scored high on a reading test.[1]

The following five questions are very subjective but can be considered as a part of the evaluation for individualized reading students in the middle grades by the observant teacher:

1. Does a child choose to read or does he elude reading?
2. Does he find reading material related to his interest?
3. Does he feel responsibility for reporting factual material accurately?
4. Does he try increasingly to try to help himself in reading?
5. Is he beginning to vary his reading techniques according to the nature of the content and his purposes?[2]

Meaningful to the total evaluation of the individual reading program is the school library and librarian according to the 1960 Standards for School Library Programs. Making

---

[1]Olvina Burrows, Teaching Children in the Middle Grades (Boston: Heath, 1952), p. 160.

[2]West, op. cit., p. 123.

use of reading scores and other pertinent data about the characteristics of individual students, the librarian should be a key-member of the instructional team in reading.[1]

"It is necessary that the librarian and the teacher work closely together in guiding the individual reading choices . . . it is necessary that the librarian be conscious of each child's reading ability."[2] (A copy of a sketch of an Individualized Reading Program used in a Des Moines, Iowa, high school is included in the Appendix.)

Is individualized reading the medicine to cure the ills of sick reading habits in today's society? Will the present drop-out figures decrease with the adoption of widespread individualized reading systems in the schools? Will an individualized reading program eventually produce a nation of avid adult readers? Is individualized reading the method by which James Allen, Jr. will meet the goal stated at the beginning of this chapter?

Without knowing the results of a widespread individualized reading program, since it does not as yet exist, the reported facts about the benefits of individualization are impressive.

Veatch pointed out that first of all the bright child does not need to be held back by slower children in his or

---

[1]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[2]Jean Louris, "Elementary School Libraries Today," New Definitions of School Library Service (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960), p. 29.

her group and is free to branch out in as many directions as his energy will allow. "Self-selection is the great emancipator of the gifted pupil."[1]

At the other end of the scale the slow reader is working on materials with which he or she can be comfortable. "His failures are private ones, and they can be kept that way."[2]

> To date, the teaching of reading has neglected the strong readers in a sometimes misdirected effort to bring the weaker ones up to grade. The able child deserves the challenges of a forthright meeting of minds in his reading program. The weak ones need the encouragement and confidence of being treated with dignity and respect. The stigma often attached to being a slow reader has no place in a scheme of individualized reading, nor does the high powered reader suffer by not receiving a fair share of time and guidance. Each is accorded the right to make choices, to match interests with appropriate reading content, and to pool his findings with those of the class. Each is offered the stimulus of an adult's sincere response to his satisfaction and success in reading.[3]

A third advantage of an individualized reading program according to Veatch is this close personal interaction with teachers to serve the child's psychological needs. Not only can a close relationship with a teacher help the child attain the sense of independence essential to his proper development, but because the

> . . . art of teaching is the act of loving and accepting a child, . . . the child who knows he is liked by his teacher finds learning an exciting adventure. It

---

[1]Veatch, op. cit., p. 28. [2]Ibid., p. 29.

[3]Burrows, op. cit., p. 166.

> is easier for the teacher to have understanding and love for a child in a one-to-one situation than it is in a ten-to-one situation.[1]

One of the most important pieces of evidence reported by Veatch as a benefit of the individualized reading is that reading becomes its own reward. "Children love to read when they can choose their own books."[2]

Here are some typical statements made by children who were asked their opinion of an individualized program vis-a' vis a basal one:

> It is more fun. (i.e. to choose own book).
> I would rather have a book that I can select myself than one given to me.
> It makes you think.
> You can read all kinds of exciting books
> If you can read hard books, you can choose a hard one, and if you want an easy book, you can choose it.
> I think this way of reading is better than reading out of readers. When you read out of readers, you have to read story after story, and in this kind of reading, you can pick up any book you want to. I think that you read more when you read by yourself.[3]

The goal of the best teaching of reading is the love of reading, as Veatch believes. "The reading program that is successful is one which sends its pupils out into the world as lovers of books and of all that reading represents."[4]

> When a child dislikes his reading experiences at school, he is certainly less likely to seek reading for leisure time activity - But a child who has been

---

[1] Veatch, loc. cit.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[3] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[4] Ibid., p. 34.

> happy in his reading, has learned to choose satisfactorily from many books and has discovered he enjoys certain kinds of reading, is going to wish to continue the pleasurable experience.[1]

Most parents seem to be in favor of self-selection according to reports received from parent conferences and many teachers using a form of individualized reading have made positive comments. One teacher wrote, "I like it because my children like it. All of my discipline problems are solved because the children are reading books on their own achievement level and ones in which they are interested because the books are of their own choosing."[2]

A seventh grade teacher began a self-selection unit because her group seemed bored and restless. Soon each student was reading two books per week and were no longer bored.[3]

An effective reading experience was revealed by an eighth grade reading teacher whose students' reading achievement range was from fifth grade to college level. Under an individualized reading plan these students amazed their teacher by sharing materials and ideas on current events. "I like it because I have more time with individual students, and I believe I am taking care of individual needs more effectively."[4]

> A sixth-grade teacher made a sociogram of her group at the beginning of the year. The results supported

---

[1] Ibid., p. 117.

[2] Ibid., p. 152.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 154.

> her suspicion that the class contained a boy "star" with a "cluster" surrounding him, a girl "star" with her "cluster," plus several "isolates." These "stars" were frequently poor influences on their peers, as was evidenced by anti-social acts in the audio visual room and on the playground, which were approved by the group.
>
> The teacher introduced self-selection as a possible way to break up the 'gangs' that she was successful is borne out by the results of a second sociogram made toward the close of the school year. This chart showed the entire class in groups of twos and threes. There were no 'stars,' no 'clusters' and no 'isolates'. The class enjoyed individualized reading, directing their energies to the writing of original poetry, plays, and stories. Such activities gave them more satisfaction, by their own admission, than their previous anti-social behavior.[1]

After a year of individualized reading an eighth grade class took the California Achievement test, the results of which revealed that all students had progressed in reading skills at least one year over the previous year. Ten students had progressed two to three years.[2]

After two years of using self-selection in a Whittier, California, school district, teachers said the following:

> For the first time I believe I am teaching reading in accordance with my knowledge of the way children grow and develop.
>
> This is a reading program which has no quarrel with what we know about how children learn.[3]

> A mother, women's page editor of our daily newspaper, had long mourned the apathy of her two daughters toward reading. With the advent of this method in her younger daughter's class she reported happily to the Claremont Reading Conference: This is one of the things we didn't believe could happen in our family. Our older girl, now in seventh grade, went through the group system, and she didn't like reading at all. This pattern was repeating itself, with our fifth grade daughter.

---

[1]Ibid., p. 155. [2]Ibid., p. 156. [3]Ibid., p. 183.

> Suddenly, this year all of us thought we were seeing things when the lights were on in her bedroom late and she was still reading. When she pulled the flashlight-under-the-blanket technique on me, I was convinced.[1]

Veatch noted the following over-all values for the child in the individualized program:

> 1. Really provides for individual differences; satisfies children's needs of seeking, self-selection and pacing.
> 2. Better integration with other language arts--more creative thinking and critical reading; wide increase in vocabulary; motivating for listening, writing, and spelling; strong desire to communicate ideas.
> 3. Decided carry-over to homes; more self-initiated reading; extensive use of public library.
> 4. Social interaction--good relationships within the class; acceptance of one another's contributions; 'Caste system' is broken down.
> 5. Better sense of his own worth--self-understanding; he is a participating member of the group--he relies on his own self-management; he feels he is a real part of the program and is learning from his own efforts and not always because of what the teacher wants him to learn.
> 6. The child actually reads; learns to cherish and handle books; respects authors and their ideas.
> 7. Children have indicated that they are happier, reading more, and learning more.[2]

Concerning the values and rewarding outcomes for the teachers, Veatch reported the following:

> 1. A one-to-one relationship with the child leads more closely to the child's needs--the teacher is the real helper.
> 2. Interest, independence, and self-status of the children lessen the probability of behavior problem.
> 3. Increased teacher growth--there is greater responsibility on the part of the teacher in identifying and adjusting skills; in developing more long-term goals; in more thinking terms of objectives and values.
> 4. Solving the problem of the wide range--more easily handled.
> 5. Integration of the curriculum--a natural outgrowth of this approach.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 185.

[2] Ibid., pp. 200-201.

6. Increased status of teacher because she has opportunities to show creativeness, resourcefulness, flexibility.
7. More support and active participation of supervisor.[1]

The evidence as presented seems a strong case in favor of more individualized reading programs with a more positive approach to reading, but perhaps there has been regression to the pre-Gutenberg times permanently as Moses suggested. When he asked the question why the United States is virtually a society of illiterates, he followed with the answer:

> Perhaps part of the fault lies with us--teachers, librarians, parents. We are more interested in what children and young people read, than that they read. I say this: it doesn't matter what they read as long as they read; read anything, read everything, read all the time.
>
> Sometimes it seems to me that nobody is really interested at all in spreading the genuine word about books and reading: what great fun is there, what wondrous companionship the good book can be, what undreamed-of worlds of ideas exist just beyond the pasteboard covers. Sometimes it seems to me that we are just more interested in what we call 'culture,' what we call 'education,' what we call 'being well-rounded,' and we lose sight of the most important goal of all: the feeding and care of imagination, of curiosity, of the creativity with which every child is equipped when he comes on stage. It seems to me that if things went right, inquisitive, free swinging children would grow up to be inquisitive, free swinging, wisdom-seeking, reading-prone adults. But something happens somewhere along the line, and we discover high school students with brilliant but tight-locked minds and rock-set opinions; college students bumping through diploma mills, buying tickets to success--students who will never read a book the rest of their lives.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 201.

> It is even more puzzling to me, because I like to think of reading the same way I think of speaking: A vital skill to be learned, a skill without which the mind is a bit crippled. I would like to believe also that learning the reading skill could and should be every bit as natural as learning to speak.[1]

When students are allowed the freedom of selection provided in individualized reading programs, the individual uniqueness described as the democratic ideal is protected.

> If the child is to develop individuality, creativity, and the ability to think clearly and interpret deeply, he must not be hampered by group regimentation. Instead he should learn to read in an environment which stimulates motives for reading, which permits free choice of materials to be read at his own rate, and receive help as needed, or at scheduled times.[2]

---

[1]Moses, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

[2]William Gray, "Role of Group and Individualized Teaching in a Sound Reading Program," The Reading Teacher, XI (December, 1957), 99-104.

Chapter 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

In this chapter data will be presented comparing the experimental group and the control group on reading achievement and enjoyment of reading during their ninth grade year at Kurtz Junior High School in Des Moines, Iowa.

The Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Form E, had been administered to all eighth grade students enrolled at Kurtz Junior High School in April, 1974, before students signed up for ninth grade classes for the following year. Form E Equivalent of the Gates-McGinnitie Test was given the following April, 1975, to the experimental group and the control group.

In May of 1975 an attitude about reading opinionnaire was distributed to both the experimental and control groups. The opinionnaire was patterned after an arithmetic opinionnaire used in the school system. A scale was devised for the opinionnaire on the basis of item ratings done by five experienced junior high school teachers of reading in the Des Moines schools.

A t-test for the mean difference of each of four sets of scores was determined. In the first, the difference between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores of the

experimental group on the comprehension section of the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test was examined. On the pre-test the range was from 29 to 50. Six students out of thirty-two obtained lower scores after being in the Independent Reading class for one school year while twenty-six students' scores increased during the same year. The t-test showed a mean difference of 1.71875 and a standard error of mean difference of .7184 for a t value of 2.3934693. At the .05 level of probability, this t value shows a significant increase in reading ability by the experimental group.

Table 1

Comparison of Scores from Pre- and Post-tests on the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Comprehension, for Subjects Enrolled in Independent Reading at Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, Iowa

		Pre-test	Post-test
Means		41.41	43.13
Mean difference	=	1.72	
Standard error	=	.718	
t	=	2.39*	
N	=	32	

*$p < .05$

Individual scores included in Appendix D, Part 1.

The difference between the pre-test scores and the post-test scores of the control group on the comprehension section of the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test was examined. As with the experimental group, the pre-test range was from 29 to 50. Nine students obtained lower scores on the post-test while twenty-three students' scores increased during the year. The t-test showed a mean difference of .8125 and a standard error of mean difference of .86209 for a t-value of .9424671. At the .05 level of probability, this t-value shows a non-significant increase in reading ability by the control group.

Table 2

Comparison of Scores from Pre- and Post-tests on the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Comprehension, for Subjects Not Enrolled in Independent Reading at Kurtz Junior High School Des Moines, Iowa

	Pre-test	Post-test
Means	41.41	42.22
Mean difference	= .812	
Standard error	= .862	
t	= .94*	
N	= 32	

*$p > .05$

Individual scores included in Appendix D, Part 2.

The t-test to determine the difference in control and experimental scores on the comprehension section of the Gates-McGinnitie post-test showed a range in the control group from 27 to 50 as compared to the range of the experimental group from 29 to 50. The mean difference of the two sets of scores was .90625; the standard error of mean difference was 1.047 for a t-test value of .8655682. In the distribution of t-probability the difference was not significant at the .05 level.

Table 3

Comparison of Scores from Experimental and Control Groups on the Comprehension Section of the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, Iowa

	Experimental	Control
Means	43.13	42.22

Mean difference = .906

Standard error = 1.047

t = .865*

N = 32

*$p > .05$

Individual scores included in Appendix D, Part 3.

Comparisons of the experimental group and the control group on their attitude toward reading was determined by use of the t-test for Independent samples. Scores on the opinionnaire were from a high of 1 to a low of 22. The range in the experimental group was from 1 to 18 and in the control group from 1 to 20. The mean difference between experimental and control was 2.36 and the standard error of the mean difference was 1.25948 which produced a t-value of 1.6737. The difference was not significant at the .05 level of probability.

Table 4

Comparison of Scores from Experimental and Control Groups, Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, Iowa, on an Attitude Opinionnaire--Scored on Basis of Teacher Ratings with Low Number Highest on Scale

	Experimental	Control
Means	7.67	10.03
Mean difference	= 2.36	
Standard error	= 1.259	
t	= 1.673*	
N	= 30	

*$p > .05$

Individual scores included in Appendix D, Part 4.

On the last day of the school year, June 10, 1975, the experimental group evaluated the class (Independent Reading). The students were assured that their comments would in no way effect their grades for the year because, in fact, the

grades had been turned in to the office, and also, if they wished not to reveal their identity on the papers, it would be acceptable to the teacher-team. Following are the most representative of comments made by the experimental group in their evaluation of ninth grade individualized reading:

> This class this year has really broadened my reading. I started out with simpler books then went to harder ones. This class should be continued next year.
>
> I really liked this class because it helped me in my vocabulary and self-expression. I think the individual should choose the book that he will read; after all, he's the one who has to read it.
>
> I thought that Independent Reading was a good idea. It helped some people develop better reading speeds. . . . I read a lot of good books this year.
>
> I thought that Independent Reading course was a good subject. I personally think that students don't get to read enough, and I think that this course lets you have enough time for just plain ol' reading. Toward the end of the year it got pretty tiresome. I don't know if it was because of reading itself, or just because school was about out. . . .
>
> I thought that Independent Reading was a terrific idea. You have more time to sit down and really read a book completely through. You will always remember each book because when you give your report, it's pretty hard to forget what it was about. I hope that these kinds of classes go on for a long time. Another good thing about this class is that you can pick any kind of book you are interested in!
>
> Individual reading is a lot of fun because I usually don't get a chance to go to the library and this gives me a chance to look at different books.
>
> I think the class is good because it gives people time to read more than you ordinarily do otherwise. It's also nice to get to pick your own books rather than being assigned.

I found this course to be quite interesting. I prefer reading alone a great improvement over reading in a group. Another advantage is you read what you want to read. The instructors were also wise in that they have eliminated written reports. Two teachers are another advantage because they add variety. Of course, in my opinion, two teachers are always better than one, but in this case, where a person has a face-to-face interview with their teacher, a variety of even two is a major improvement.

You get a greater knowledge of people and things. . . . I like a chance to talk with someone about my book and myself.

I really enjoyed reading before, but now I have a reason to. I like to talk about books to people. . . . I like people to suggest books.

I think more schools should have Independent Reading courses and just plain other courses in which the students work at an individual speed . . . if anybody tries to push me into doing something when I don't want to or really can't, my first reaction is anger and rebellion. . . .

I've never had any time before to just sit down and read, ...

It's somewhere quiet to read. . . .

It's a good class but it should have had more freedom not to keep yelling at us to read. . . . It should be fully independent.

I have improved my personality since I started reading. . . . I was going to quit when _____ did to help him in the dark room to develop pictures for the paper, but I decided reading was more important.

Even though suggestions were made, there were no completely negative comments received through the written evaluations of Independent Reading by the members of the class.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, RESULTS, AND CONCLUSIONS

I. SUMMARY

This study dealt with the effects of an elective individualized reading class on the reading ability and reading enjoyment of a group of ninth graders at Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, Iowa.

On the basis of age, sex, and the scores which thirty-two members of the ninth grade independent reading class earned on the comprehension section of the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test at the conclusion of their eighth grade year, April, 1974, the students were matched with students in the experimenter's ninth grade English classes who were not enrolled in the Independent Reading class. In April of 1975, the Gates-McGinnitie Test was given (Form E Equivalent) to both groups of matched students. In addition, an opinionnaire concerning attitude about reading was given in May of 1975 to both groups of matched students.

In their English class the control group read assigned stories over which objective quizzes were given throughout the year. There was one four-week novel unit which allowed students to choose full-length fiction books to read. At the conclusion of the unit written reports following a specific

outline were due. Reading was not emphasized in the control group's class because of its survey approach to the total aspect of English as a subject.

The experimental group chose independent reading as a class in addition to their regular English course. Books were selected on the basis of individual interest since there was no prescribed reading list. Instead of written reports, quizzes, or tests over their reading, student-conferences were arranged with one member of the two-member teaching team composed of the school librarian and a ninth grade English teacher who was also the experimenter. A conference evaluation form was filled out during the meeting between student and "teacher."

Because the number of students involved in the study was relatively small, the subjective evaluations of the students in the Independent Reading class were regarded as a pertinent part of the study.

II. RESULTS

From this study, the following results were compiled:

1. As a group, students enrolled in the Independent Reading class at Kurtz Junior High School, 1974-1975, showed a significant growth at the .05 level of probability in their comprehension reading ability during the school year as indicated by the increase of post-test over pre-test scores on the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test.

2. Students in the control group showed a non-significant difference at the .05 level of probability in their reading comprehension from the pre-test to the post-test scores on the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test.

3. Compared to the control group, the students in the Independent Reading class did not make any more significant gains in their reading comprehension over the 1974-1975 school year than students not enrolled in the Independent Reading course. This information was determined by a t-test comparing post-test scores of the matched groups.

4. The over-all attitude toward reading was better in the Independent Reading class than in the control group, but for study purposes these differences in attitude were insignificant at the .05 level of probability as far as future predictions are concerned about Independent Reading classes enjoying reading more than other groups.

5. The majority of the students in Independent Reading indicated in writing that they had benefitted from being able to select their own books, to have time to read, and to share their reading experience with another person. There seemed to be a subjective value gained by individuals in the Independent Reading class.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are presented as a result of undertaking this study:

1. An Independent Reading class at the ninth grade level will not insure an improvement in reading comprehension as compared to a group of ninth graders who are not enrolled in an Independent Reading class.

2. An Independent Reading class at the ninth grade level will not insure a more positive reading attitude than a group of ninth graders who are not enrolled in an Independent Reading class.

3. While (comprehension) reading ability and reading attitude did not vary significantly between the control group and the experimental group, the time spent between "teacher" and student building trust and rapport in a one-to-one, face-to-face confrontation seemed to be invaluable and could not be measured by scores on an objective basis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

Barbe, Walter B. Educator's Guide to Personalized Reading Instruction. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961.

Botel, Morton. How to Teach Reading. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1962.

Burrows, Alvina. Teaching Children in the Middle Grades. Boston: Heath, 1952.

Huelsman, Charles B. Reading in the Secondary Schools. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1951.

Leedy, Paul D. Improve Your Reading: A Guide to Greater Speed, Understanding, and Enjoyment. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956.

Mazurkiewicz, Albert J. New Perspectives in Reading Instruction. New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964.

Newton, J. Roy. Reading in Your School. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1960.

Sebesta, Sam Leaton, and Carl Wallen. Readings on Teaching Reading. New York: Science Research Associates, 1972.

Smith, Nila B. Reading Instruction for Today's Children. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

Tooze, Ruth. Your Children Want to Read. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1957.

Veatch, Jeannette. Individualizing Your Reading Program. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959.

West, Roland. Individualized Reading Instruction. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1964.

B. PERIODICALS

Allen, James E. "Target for the 70's, the Right to Read," American Education, V (December, 1969), 2-4.

Arbuthnot, May Hill. "Developing Life Values Through Reading," Elementary English, XXXXIII (January, 1966), 10-16.

Archer, Marguerite P. "Individualized Reading: A Commentary on Its Future," Library Journal, XV (April, 1965), 1978-80.

Barbe, Walter B. "Personalized Reading," Library Journal, LXXXVI (October, 1961), 3609-II.

Gray, William. "Role of Group and Individualized Teaching in a Sound Reading Program," The Reading Teacher, XI (December, 1957), 99-104.

Olson, Arthur V. "Why Should We Teach Reading?" The Clearing House, XL (October, 1965), 94-96.

Witty, Paul A. "Individualized Reading: A Postscript," Elementary English, XLI (March, 1964), 211-217.

_____. "Individualized Reading - A Summary and Evaluation," Elementary English, XXXVI (October, 1959), 18-87, 401-12.

C. GENERAL REFERENCES AND ESSAYS/ ARTICLES IN COLLECTIONS

Bagley, N., and H. S. Conrad. "Child Development: General Aspects," Encyclopedia of Educational Research. New York: Macmillan, 1950.

Jacobs, Leland B. "Individualized Reading Is Not a Thing!" Individual Reading Practices. Columbia University: Bureau of Publications.

Moses, Richard B. "For the Teens, Interest Comes First," What Is Reading Doing to the Child? Earrick and Stoops, eds. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1967.

D. PAMPHLETS AND PUBLICATIONS

Burge, Georgia. "Overview" (From Iowa Department of Public Instruction English Language Curriculum Series), Guided Individualized Reading, Pamphlet #2.

Hunt, Lyman C. "Patterns of Questions in the Individual Conference" (University of Vermont, 1971).

Lourie, Jean. "Elementary School Libraries Today," New Definitions of School Library Service. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

E. RESEARCH STUDIES

Hughes, Marie. "Theoretical Considerations Underlying Program of Self-selection with Recommendations," in Delores E. Palmer, To Determine the Relations of 4th Graders to a Program of Self-selection. University of Utah, 1946.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

OPINIONNAIRE TO STUDENTS IN BOTH EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

Name _____

(A) Please place a check before the items with which you agree.

(B) Then, place a star before the item that best expresses your attitude toward reading.

1. I read books outside of school.
2. I don't feel sure of myself in reading.
3. I enjoy seeing how rapidly I can read a book.
4. I like reading but I like other subjects just as well.
5. I like to read because I like to learn.
6. I don't think reading is fun but I always want to do it well.
7. I am not enthusiastic about reading but I have no real dislike for it either.
8. Reading is as important as any other subject.
9. Reading is something you have to do even though it is enjoyable.
10. Sometimes I enjoy the challenge of reading a book.
11. I have always been afraid of reading.

12. I would like to spend more time in school just reading books.
13. I detest reading and avoid it whenever I can.
14. I enjoy reading when the words are easy for me to read.
15. I avoid reading because I'm not a very good reader.
16. Reading excites me and I like it better than any other subject.
17. I never get tired of reading.
18. Reading is very interesting.
19. I have never liked reading.
20. I think reading is the most enjoyable subject I have taken.
21. I can't see much value in reading.
22. I am afraid of answering questions over my reading.

APPENDIX B

INDEPENDENT READING EVALUATION

Student _____

Date _____

Title _____

Author _____

Publisher _____

Date of publication _____

Type of book (fiction, non-fiction, biography, etc.) . . . . . _____

I. Quality of the selection

A. Suitability (10) . . . . . _____

B. Maturity (10) . . . . . _____

C. Difficulty (10) . . . . . _____

D. Variety of subject matter (10) . . _____

E. Length of book (10) . . _____

II. Quality of the conference

A. Plot (what happens) (20) . . _____

B. Characterizations (the people) (15) . . _____

C. Theme (the message) (15) . . _____

Total possible points (100)

TOTAL POINTS _____

Remarks:

APPENDIX C

SKETCH OF CLASS SYLLABUS

I. INDIVIDUALIZED READING

The course allows students to select books they desire to read from the school library, teacher's reading lists, and other sources. Class time will be spent reading the selections. Emphasis will be placed upon the affective values of literature, encouraging students to relate the literature they read to their lives. Evaluation will be on an individual basis through conferences with the teacher.

Materials: No text

Objectives:
1. To give student time for reading and to help him develop habit of reading books.
2. To help student learn how to analyze the material he reads and to help him learn to apply literature to his life.
3. To help student improve communication skills (through oral and written discussion of material).

Syllabus: None, but the following guidelines were submitted January, 1971.
1. Evaluation of books
   Each book the student reads will be evaluated on a 1-4 basis according to the complexity and length of the book.
2. Written questions
   The student will answer a written question for each book on a 5 x 8 card. The student would receive 1-4 points for the answer.
3. Conference with teacher
   Following completion of the written question, the student will discuss the book with the teacher. One to four points will be given for the oral discussion based on the following criteria:

1 point - Plot summary only
2 points - Application of book to student's life
3 points - Application to human ideas, values
4 points - Understanding of level of meaning, esthetic values, and relationship with other reading.

II. GRADING

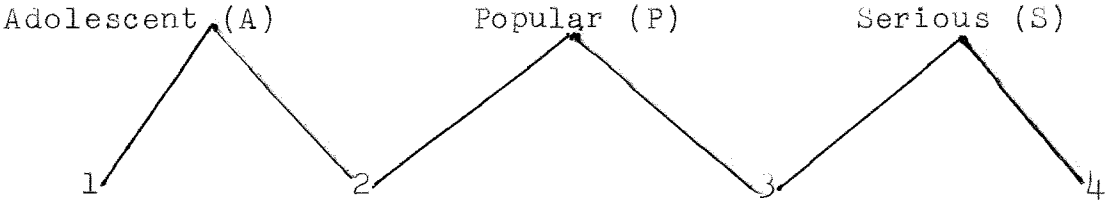
A. Oral
B. Written > plus

C. Rating > times

EX:
Of Mice and Men

(O - 3) + (W - 2) x R (P 3) = 15

times number of books read during the semester



Bonus points available for improvement
Penalties, -5 pts. for poor use of class time

APPENDIX D

Part 1

Scores of Experimental Group at Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, on Pre- and Post Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Comprehension. Survey E (Guides 7-9) Administered 4-74 and Form E Equivalent Administered 4-75

Student Number	Pre-test	Post-test	D^2
1	33	34	1
2	38	49	121
3	48	42	36
4	44	49	25
5	45	50	25
6	45	45	0
7	36*	38	4
8	39*	40	1
9	48	49	1
10	47	48	1
11	44	44	0
12	40	46	36
13	48	49	1
14	43	46	9
15	41	46	25
16	42	47	25
17	38	39	1
18	49	37	144
19	38*	38	0
20	44	46	4
21	42	47	25
22	24*	29	25
23	46	50	16
24	34	40	36
25	46	47	1
26	30	29	1
27	43	72	1
28	40	45	25
29	41	42	1
30	42	40	4
31	48	47	1
32	39	40	1

*Entered Individualized Reading at Second Semester.

APPENDIX D

Part 2

Scores of Control Group at Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, on Pre- and Post Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Comprehension. Survey E (Grades 7-9) Administered 4-74 and Form E Equivalent Administered 4-75

Student Number	Pre-test	Post-test	D^2
1	33	27	36
2	38	40	4
3	48	52	16
4	44	47	9
5	45	41	16
6	45	46	1
7	36	39	9
8	39	45	36
9	48	33	225
10	47	48	1
11	44	39	25
12	40	50	100
13	48	50	4
14	43	39	16
15	41	40	1
16	42	41	1
17	38	38	0
18	49	51	4
19	38	39	1
20	44	40	16
21	42	49	49
22	24	32	64
23	46	49	9
24	34	38	16
25	46	48	4
26	30	34	16
27	43	45	4
28	40	43	9
29	41	43	4
30	42	34	64
31	48	50	4
32	39	41	4

APPENDIX D

Part 3

Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups at Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, on the Comprehension Section of the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test, Post-test Form E Equivalent Administered 4-75

Student Number	Experimental	Control	D^2
1	34	27	49
2	49	40	81
3	42	52	100
4	49	47	4
5	50	41	81
6	45	46	1
7	38*	39	1
8	40*	45	25
9	49	33	256
10	48	48	0
11	44	39	25
12	46	50	16
13	49	50	1
14	46	39	49
15	46	40	36
16	47	41	36
17	39	38	1
18	37	51	196
19	38*	39	1
20	46	40	36
21	47	49	4
22	29*	32	9
23	50	49	1
24	40	38	4
25	47	48	1
26	29	34	25
27	42	45	9
28	45	43	4
29	42	43	1
30	40	34	36
31	47*	50	9
32	40	41	1

*Entered Independent Reading at Second Semester.

APPENDIX D

Part 4

Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups at Kurtz Junior High School, Des Moines, on an Attitude Opinionnaire--Scored on Basis of Teacher Ratings - Low Number = Highest

Student Number	Experimental	Control	X_E	X_C	X_E^2	X_C^2
1	7	(not counted)	-	-	-	-
2	13	5	-5.33	5.03	28.41	25.3
3	7	7	.67	3.03	.45	9.18
4	1	13	6.67	-2.97	44.49	8.82
5	7	13	.67	-2.97	.45	8.82
6	1	9	6.67	1.03	44.49	1.06
7	16*	17	-8.33	-6.97	69.39	48.58
8	7	9	.67	1.03	.45	1.06
9	2	20	5.67	-9.97	32.15	99.4
10	2	7	5.67	3.03	32.15	9.18
11	11	18	3.33	-7.97	11.01	63.52
12	1	10	6.67	.03	44.49	.0009
13	2	13	5.67	-2.97	32.15	8.82
14	9	15	1.33	-4.97	1.77	24.7
15	10	(Dropped out of school)	-	-	-	-
16	11	13	-3.33	-2.97	11.01	8.82
17	11	7	-3.33	3.03	11.01	9.18
18	17	3	-9.33	7.03	87.05	49.42
19	12*	4	4.33	6.03	18.75	36.36
20	4	7	3.67	3.03	13.47	9.18
21	2	7	5.67	3.03	32.15	9.18
22	7*	14	.67	-3.97	.45	15.76
23	3	5	4.67	5.03	21.81	25.3
24	18	13	10.33	-2.97	106.71	8.82
25	7	1	.67	9.03	.45	81.54
26	13	19	5.33	-8.97	28.41	80.46
27	7	12	.67	-1.97	.45	4.88
28	13	13	5.33	-2.97	28.41	8.82
29	7	2	.67	8.03	.45	64.48
30	7	13	.67	-2.97	.45	8.82
31	5*	10	2.67	.03	7.13	.0009
32	7	2	.67	8.03	.45	64.48

*Entered Independent Reading at Second Semester.